

A

REVIEW

OF THE

Affairs of *FRANCE*:

With Observations on TRANSACTIONS at Home.

 Thursday, November 22. 1755.

I Remember a Reverend and Learned English Divine, who, tho' a Dissenter, has a General Respect and Deference paid to his Learning and Character by Men of Learning in the Church; I mean, Mr. David Clarkson, Tutor to Dr. Tillotson, the late Excellent Archbishop of Canterbury, left behind him a small Book published after his Death, entitled, *A Discourse of Liturgies*.

In the 2d or 3d Pages of this Book, as he was a fair but terrible Adversary, he Fences against the Cavil he expected, by a Proviso to this Purpose; for I do not quote them literally, having not the Book with me; "It is not the using or not using of Liturgies in the Primitive Church that is the Question; I know there were Liturgies used in the several Churches in some earlier Days of Religion: But 'tis the imposing these Liturgies, and a strict literal Conformity to them, as Terms of Communion, which is the thing I deny."

In answer to this little Tract, Dr. Camber,

then *Prescentor of York*, prints a large Tract of three times the Bulk, wherein he takes a great deal of Learned Pains to rummage Antiquity, and prove, That Liturgies were in Use in the Primitive Church, which Mr. Clarkson never denied; and this, with some harsh Reproaches on the Deceased, as to Translation, and rendering his Quotations, he calls an Answer to Mr. Clarkson.

That I may not be answered here, that in the present Case, I have granted for the sake of Argument, what nevertheless I never saw prov'd, *viz.* That the Civil Authority of a Nation has really Power to oblige us to indifferent things in the Worship of God, and by their Sanction to make them absolutely necessary,

May it please your Lordships and Reverend Fathers of the Convocation, to allow me what, as I noted, was never moved before, *viz.* to examine,

1. Is there any necessity for the imposing these indifferent things? Has not then that

Civil Authority incur'd a Guilt, when imposing by its Power what is not necessary to be imposed, it has err'd in Judgment, and commanded that which it ought not to have commanded? things indifferent in their nature, become not indifferent when any Circumstances of Publick Injury renders the imposing them to be dangerous to the Peace and Welfare of the Publick; and in this Case, tho' the Civil Magistrate had a General Power to impose things really indifferent, yet as the Civil Power is really subordinate to the Great End of Power, *the Publick Good*; so when the Publick Injury is apparently the Relative to this, Antecedent, the Right that Power had to this imposing Article ceases.

Power may be said not to be able to do what it cannot legally do, because Justice is the End of Power. Now the Civil Power is the Guardian of the Publick Peace, and it cannot justly be said to do any thing destructive to that Peace, and in that Sense really had no Right to do it. Now it is apparently prejudicial to that Peace, to impose Terms of Communion, which are in themselves indifferent, *any farther than as that Power pretends to make them necessary*, because this tends to Division of the Church, into Parties, Sects, and Opinions differing in Principles, and too much in Charity.

In this respect I think the matters thus to be imposed, cease to be indifferent, tho' they might otherwise be so in themselves.

And this is otherwise farther confirmed by that Doctrine of Tendernefs and Charity, by which we are commanded to avoid even lawful things, rather than to make our weak Brother to offend: and the Apostle's Declaration about his eating Flesh, is a very remarkable Instance of it.

If then it be not lawful for us to do even things indifferent and lawful in themselves, when it may endanger, making our weaker Brother to offend; in that Case indifferent things become no longer indifferent, the Power to impose them, *as such*, ceases; they become as things Circumstantially forbidden and unlawful, the Civil Magistrate has nothing to do to impose them, and the Conscience is left entirely free; for as it would be sinful in the Man to comply, whose Conscience agrees not either with the Thing or with the Ordinance, *as they call it*, of

Civil Power imposing, *and yet* the Civil Magistrate have Power to impose it; it would be sinful to oppose the lawful Authority, and yet be sinful to comply with it; the Man must then be under a necessity of sinning one way or another: A fatal Circumstance, which no Human Power can justify bringing any body under.

In this Case therefore I humbly refer it to Consideration, whether there is not, or may not be a Time when the Civil Power *ought not* to impose things otherwise indifferent in themselves, as Terms of Communion; and whether instead of those things becoming necessary by the Sanction of the Civil Authority, they did not cease to be indifferent before, and so out of the Power of Civil Authority?

I know and easily foresee a Cavil may be raised here, that this is no Objection against the Civil Power, having a Right to impose indifferent things; but an Enquiry, whether these things were indifferent or no?

To this I answer; I am content it shall remain so, and *then it must be allowed*, that when any indifferent thing will shock the Conscience of a tender Christian, it ceases to be indifferent, and humane Power has no more Right to impose it; and let them grant me which of these two Parts they please, 'tis the same thing; for either way the Civil Authority has no Right to exclude us the Communion of the Church upon imposed Terms; the Matters so imposed being ow'd by them to be indifferent in themselves.

And thus, my Lords, I bring it to my Enquiry, Whether the excluding the *Dissenters* from the Communion with the Church, because they cannot comply with things indifferent, be *A NECESSARY IMPOSITION*; and pardon me, my Lords, if this Imposition be not prov'd necessary, I doubt very much how it can be proved *Lawful*, since all the Power the Civil Authority can have to make indifferent things necessary, must be confin'd to the Good of the Church; else such things by the same Authority might be imposed, which might in time tend to the Overthrow and Destruction of the Church: the Power will in this Case at least its reason depend entirely upon *the necessity*, which I am an humble Petitioner to your Reverend Assembly may be duly consider'd. I

I cannot imagine so meanly of the Reverend Clergy of the Church of England, now Assembled in Convocation, that they would insist upon Imposing any thing upon their Dissenting Brethren, which is not absolutely necessary to be impos'd; this would be a Scandal upon their Chari'y, as well as upon their Honesty; both which I hope they will be Concern'd to Vindicate.

If it shall be alledg'd here, the Necessity of this is Contain'd in the Act of Uniformity; the Preamble to which, justifies it self as follows :

WHEREAS, in the first Year of the late Queen Elizabeth, there was one Uniform Order of Common Service and Prayer, and of the Administration of Sacraments, Rites and Ceremonies in the Church of England (agreeable to the Word of God, and usage of the Primitive Church) compiled by the Reverend Bishops and Clergy, set forth in one Book, Entitled, The Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies in the Church of ENGLAND, and enjoyned to be used by Act of Parliament, holden in the said first year of the said late Queen, Entitled, An Act for the Uniformity of Common Prayer, and Service in the Church, and Administration of the Sacraments, very comfortable to all good People, desirous to live in Christian Conversation, and most profitable to the Estate of this Realm, upon the which the Mercy, Favour and Blessing of Almighty God, is in no wise so readily and plentifully poured, as by Common-Prayers, due using of the Sacraments, and often Preaching of the Gospel, with Devotion of the Hearers: And yet this notwithstanding a great number of People in divers parts of this Realm, following their own Sensuality, and living without knowledge and due fear of God, do willfully and schismatically abstain and refuse to come to their Parish-Churches, and other Publick places, where Common Prayer, Administration of the Sacraments, and Preaching of the Word of God, are us'd upon the Sundays and other days, ordained and appointed to be kept and observed as Holy-days: And whereas by the great and scandalous neglect of Ministers in the said Order, or Liturgy, so set forth and enjoined, as a-

foresaid, great Mischiefs and Inconveniencies, during the times of the late unhappy trouble have arisen and grown; and many People have been led into Factions, and Schisms, to the great decay and scandal of the Reformed Religion of the Church of England, and to the hazard of many Souls.

For God's sake, my Lords and Fathers of the Church, let us Examine our selves for the Necessity of Literal Impositions here, and not go back to Ages past for Reasons; if their Reasons are good now, they will bear the Test, let them be Examined; 'tis not enough for us to say, Our Fathers had good Reason for what they did; the Actions of Our Fathers want frequent Additions, Explications, and Emendations, and sometimes by Circumstances become very Unnecessary and Inconvenient, requir'd to be Reviv'd and Repealed; they grow Old and out of Date, and what was reasonable and necessary forty Years ago, may be otherwise, nay, quite the contrary now; and what we do now, may require the like Regulations in forty Years more, and yet no Disaparagement to our Care, Integrity, or Capacity neither; *Humanum est Errare*, Parliaments, Convocations, and all sorts of Assemblies, are subject to fall and be mistaken; and if present time did not always see occasion to repeal, and reverse the Laws and Sentences of the last, there would need no more Representative, either in Church or State.

Let us therefore, my Lords, bring this Great Matter to the Test; and no, Reflection upon the Age wherein this Act was made, the Humble Prayer of this Petition, is, That your Lordships would be Pleas'd to Examine, in your Reverend Assembly, *who are the proper Judges*, Whether Our Fathers had a Necessity, to make these Exclusive Laws, and to Impose as necessary their Indifferent things, *acknowledg'd to be so*, as Terms of Communion?

Nor is this all, but supposing they had, *which nevertheless I do not grant*; then this Address, is farther press'd to your Lordships to examine, Whether that Necessity does yet continue or no? either of which will be the same thing; for if there either was
not

not a Necessity, at the time of the Enacting, or that Necessity does *not yet remain*; let which will happen to fall out, the Act of *Uniformity* Imposing such and such indifferent things, as Terms of Communion, will appear Scandalous to the Church, Injurious to the Publick Peace, and a Grievance to the whole Nation.

If it be requir'd here, what shall be Call'd a Necessity; I confess, it requires a long Discourse to ascertain that, and I chose rather to Refer it to your Lordships, and the rest of the Convocation, than to be very particular upon that Head; but in general the Necessity must be Confin'd to things *absolutely so*, such as the Preservation of the Church or State, the Maintaining the Christian Religion, or the Civil Government; there may be some other things, which your Lordships may call Necessities, which nevertheless I shall not enter into here, leaving the Determination of that to your selves; and should be Glad to see any body Enumerate the Necessity the Church had to make these Exclusive Laws, and how that Necessity still remains to continue them in force, or make any Additions to them, binding the heavy burthens of our Antecessors faster upon the Backs of our Posterity.

If, instead of any other Answer to this, I should be so happy as to have Orders to prove, that neither our Fathers had, or we of this Age have any Colour or Pretence, for the Necessity of these things; I should think my self Honour'd to be Employ'd in so ealie a Task, and would Undertake to prove, that instead of this Pretended Necessity, there was a Necessity, *had their Eyes been Open to the general Good, either in Church or State*, to have set open the Doors of the Church, that all that could, might come in; that all the Scruples and Objections of People Tender in Conscience, and otherwise willing to have continued in the General Union of the Church, should have been satisf'd, by all the Tender Soft ways of Kindness and Charity, and Souls *won over* to the Christian Church, by Gentleness, Meekness and Love; and not by Imposition of Ceremonies, and Terms of Communion, contrary to the Laws of God, and the Interest of the Nation, drive Thousands from the Church,

that would otherwise have continued close to it.

I should then Enumerate the Miserable Consequence of these Impositions, and what this Nation has suffer'd by them, in above forty Years time; and Pardon me if I shall say, I could Describe the Unhappy Consequences, which are yet like to attend this Nation, if this Breach be not heal'd by your Lordships, and the Fathers Assembled with you; whose Province it is, who are qualifi'd for this Work, and which, 'tis the Humble Opinion of this Poor Author, you cannot in Conscience omit.

A Paper being Cry'd about; Entitled my Lord H——*sbam's* Speech. The Author of this signifies to the World, that the Heads of that Paper (with all due Respect to his Lordship if it be his) will come under some Consideration, in the next *Review*, as a Digression; the Scheme of the *Review* being laid before, for the very Subject there Propos'd.

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